

Organize Your Life With Free Online Tools

Overwhelmed by the mere thought of getting your hectic schedule on track? Here are nine essential Web apps to help you get your must-do's done.

By Gina Trapani

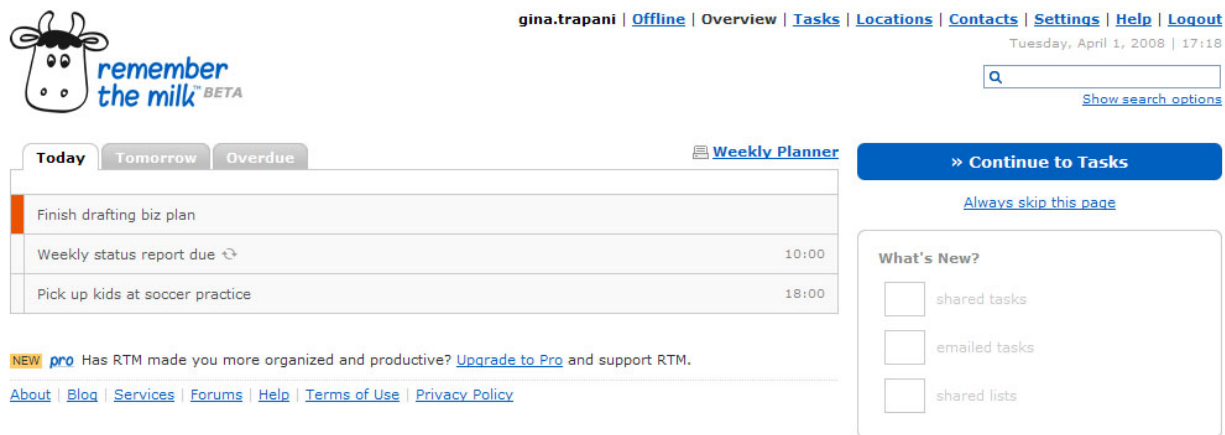
Apr 9, 2008 1:00 am

When you can barely make out the note you scribbled on the back of that coffee-stained receipt, and you haven't turned over the wall calendar's page since mid-2007, it's time to get organized with digital tools.

Nowadays the best place to find personal organizer software isn't necessarily on the desktop--it's on the Web. You already know that users are opting out of heavy desktop applications such as Microsoft Outlook for the likes of Gmail and Google Calendar.

But when it comes to managing your tasks, projects, and notes, the big names don't always have the best offerings. A new crop of rich Web applications offer smart tools you need to organize your life using any device that has a Web browser or an e-mail client, be it PC, Mac, or smart phone. As the founder of Lifehacker.com, I spend a lot of time trying out new Web-based personal organizers. Here are my choices of some of the best-of-breed options available online now.

1. Track Your Tasks With Remember the Milk



gina.trapani | [Offline](#) | [Overview](#) | [Tasks](#) | [Locations](#) | [Contacts](#) | [Settings](#) | [Help](#) | [Logout](#)

Tuesday, April 1, 2008 | 17:18

[Show search options](#)

Today | [Tomorrow](#) | [Overdue](#) | [Weekly Planner](#)

» Continue to Tasks

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What's New?

- ☐ shared tasks
- ☐ emailed tasks
- ☐ shared lists

NEW pro Has RTM made you more organized and productive? [Upgrade to Pro](#) and support RTM.

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The opening screen at Remember the Milk lists all the tasks you've got due today.

The weekly status report is due every Thursday morning at 10:00 AM. You've got to pick up the dry cleaning next Wednesday after 3:00. Your business plan draft has festered unattended to for a week now. This afternoon it's your turn to pick up the kids from soccer practice. Before your brain blue-screens, take a moment to offload your to-do list into Remember the Milk, a full-featured task manager that categorizes and prioritizes to-do's into convenient lists.

RTM even makes "honey do" lists easy to manage: your Milk-using spouse, secretary, boss, or business partner can send task requests directly to your RTM inbox so you can incorporate them into your master plan instantly. If you upgrade to a Pro account for \$25 per year, you'll have access to Windows Mobile syncing and an iPhone-friendly interface.

2. Store Notes and Research at Backpack

The screenshot displays the Backpack web interface. At the top is a blue navigation bar with links: Newsroom, Pages (selected), Calendar, Reminders, and Writeboards. On the right side of this bar are links: Settings, Users, Account, My info, and Logout. Below the navigation bar, there's a light blue header area with the text 'Add a List Note Writeboard Divider or add Tags'. The main content area is titled 'Thailand Vacation Plans'. It features three sections: 'Must-do' (empty), 'To-do' (containing a list of tasks: 'Send passport info to travel agent', 'Search Kayak for flights', 'Email Bangkok guest house for reservation on the 29th', and 'Research trip insurance', with an 'Add an item' link below), and 'Maybe-do' (containing a note about 'Elephant riding?' dated 1 Apr, with a link to 'This elephant camp'). At the bottom of the main area are sharing options: 'Share this page, Email me a copy, Duplicate, Remove from sidebar, Delete this page', the page's unique address 'sexibu40@ginatrapani.backpackit.com', and a 'Feed for this page, History of changes' link. On the right sidebar, there's a 'Make a new page' button, a search box, and links for 'Notes to self', 'All pages', 'Notes to self', and 'SCRlog'. A dark grey bar separates the sidebar from the main content, with the title 'Thailand Vacation Plans' below it. At the bottom of the sidebar is a promotional box for upgrading the account.

Newsroom Pages Calendar Reminders Writeboards Settings Users Account My info Logout

Add a List Note Writeboard Divider or add Tags

Thailand Vacation Plans

Must-do

Book Phi Phi Island accomodations 1 Apr
We should check out Hat Rantee—a bit off the beaten path, but looks beautiful!

To-do

- ☐ Send passport info to travel agent
- ☐ Search Kayak for flights
- ☐ Email Bangkok guest house for reservation on the 29th
- ☐ Research trip insurance

[Add an item](#)

Maybe-do

Elephant riding? 1 Apr
[This elephant camp](#) looks like they actually take care of their pachyderms.

Share this page, Email me a copy, Duplicate, Remove from sidebar, Delete this page
This page's address: sexibu40@ginatrapani.backpackit.com (Reset address, What is this?)
 Feed for this page, History of changes

[Make a new page](#)

[Notes to self](#)
[All pages](#)

[Notes to self](#)
[SCRlog](#)

Thailand Vacation Plans

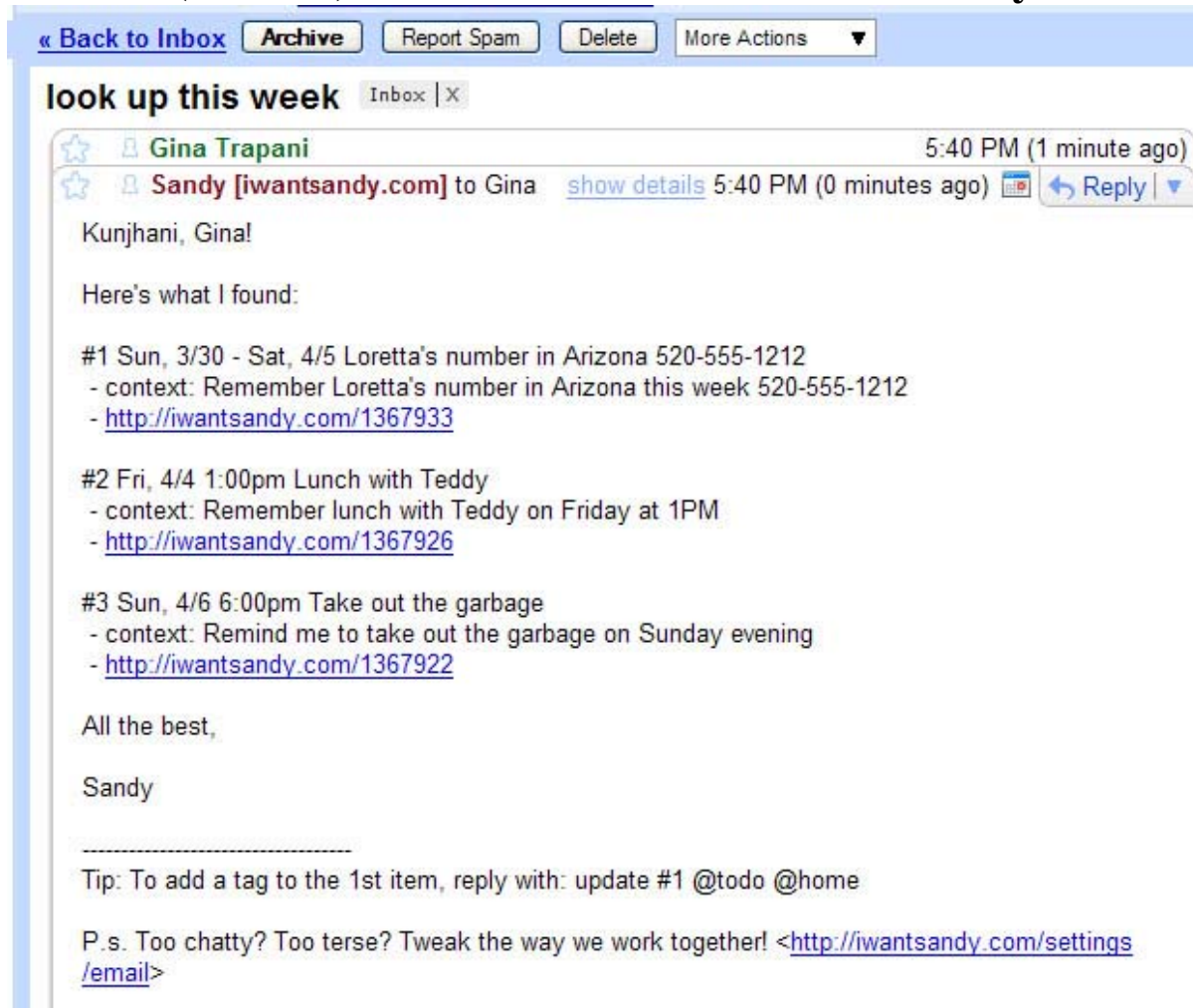
Upgrade your account and save \$5 off your first month
Visit your [account screen](#), select an upgraded plan, and enter coupon code **BPFREEUP** on the next screen to save \$5 off your first month!

Add and edit lists, notes, and dividers on a page within Backpack, and drag and drop them to re-order them on-page.

Collaborate on and manage notes and research with the Web-based notebook [Backpack](#). Whether you're planning your next vacation, drafting The Great American Novel, or just want a private place to incubate ideas, you can create an editable page at Backpack and drop in notes, lists, news items, and comments.

Each Backpack page has a unique e-mail address, so when you're struck with a brilliant insight standing in line at the grocery store, just dash off an e-mail on your phone to insert it into your page on the spot. A limited free version of Backpack is available; pricing for paid versions starts at \$12 a month and buys you file storage space, more pages, a group calendar, and message boards.

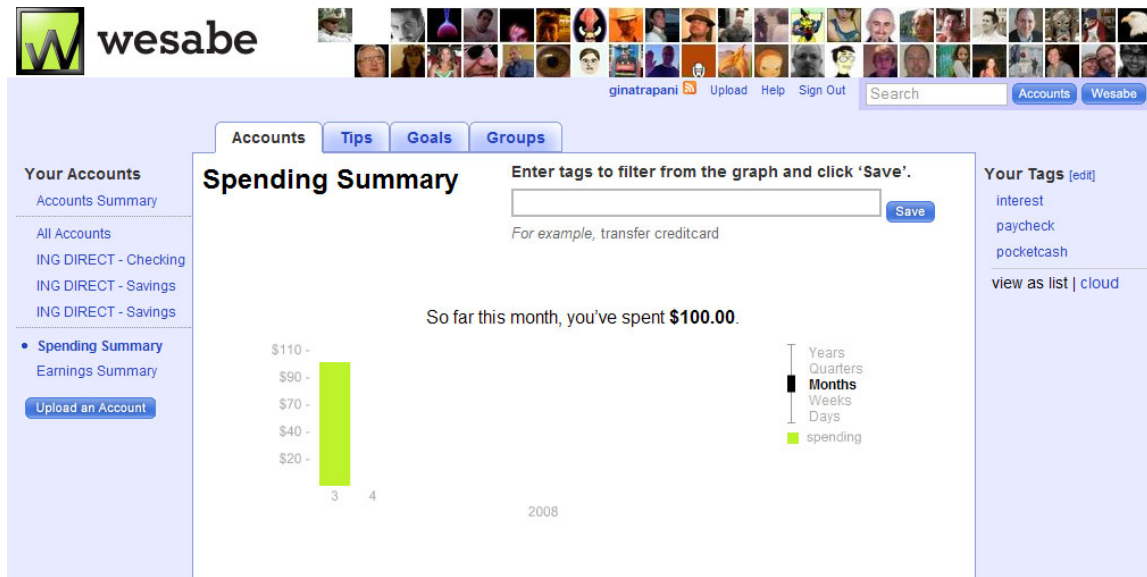
3. Get a (Virtual) Personal Assistant Named Sandy



Send an e-mail to your Sandy address to receive a reminder.

Wake up to a cheery daily agenda from your new virtual personal assistant, [Sandy](#), who communicates with you primarily via e-mail and text messages. Here's how it works: Send Sandy an e-mail that reads something like "Reminder: Lunch with Ted on Friday at 1PM." Sandy will add the appointment to Friday's agenda and fire off a reminder that afternoon with such good-natured aplomb you'll think she might be flesh and blood. Sandy can also store, tag, and recall important bits of information via e-mail commands, like a flight number or directions.

4. Make Sense of Your Dollars With Wesabe



Wesabe's spending summary charts where your money goes.

When the thought of firing up Quicken makes you want to clean out the garage instead, head over to Web-based money manager [Wesabe](#). Register for a free Wesabe account, and upload your bank account information by hand, or use Wesabe's desktop uploader or its Firefox extension to automatically enter account transactions into Wesabe. (Relax--Wesabe doesn't store your online banking passwords, and it keeps your transaction data safe and secure. Check out [its extensive Privacy Policy](#) to see how.)

You can skip balancing your checkbook now--Wesabe organizes all your account transactions in a single place, translates "bankspeak" into human-friendly transaction descriptions, charts a birds-eye view of where your money's going, and puts its community of users to work to help you save money and reach your financial goals.

5. Find the Perfect Gift With Amazon Gift Organizer

amazon.com Hello, Gina M. Trapani. We have recommendations for you. (Not Gina?)
Gina's Amazon.com Today's Deals Gifts & Wish Lists Gift Cards Your Account | Help

Shop All Departments Search Amazon.com GO Cart Your Lists

Gifts Gift Certificates/Cards Free E-cards Gift Guides Gift Organizer Wish List Wedding Registry Baby Registry Gift Wrap Gift FAQ

giftcentral Welcome to your Gift Organizer, Gina M. Trapani. (If you are not Gina M. Trapani, [click here](#))
Gift Organizer is the only tool you'll ever need to plan and track all your gift-giving.

Your Gift Organizer

Recipient List > add a new recipient
sort by name GO

Andrew Cid Trapani profile | edit | remove Birthday: March 28
Find Wish Lists | Saved Gift Ideas | Saved Occasions | Gift History
 Recommended for Andrew Cid Trapani:
The Muppet Show - The Complete Third Season
> Get more gift ideas

Jared Trapani profile | edit | remove Birthday: March 22
Find Wish Lists | Saved Gift Ideas | Saved Occasions | Gift History
 Recommended for Jared Trapani:
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (Book 7)
> Get more gift ideas

Jeremy Trapani profile | edit | remove Birthday: April 17
Find Wish Lists | Saved Gift Ideas | Saved Occasions | Gift History
 Recommended for Jeremy Trapani:
Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules (Diary of a Wimpy Kid)
> Get more gift ideas

Your Purchase History
You can add items purchased as gifts to the Gift History of the person to whom you gave them, creating a record of your giving and improving your future gift recommendations.
 Counting Kisses
Purchased on March 22, 2008
Was this item purchased as a gift? Yes No
> Organize more of your remaining purchases

Gifting Occasions > add a new occasion

April 2008

APR 17 THU April 17: Birthday Recipients: Mom edit | remove
> Find gifts for this occasion

APR 17 THU April 17: Birthday Recipients: Jeremy Trapani edit | remove
> Find gifts for this occasion




Amazon Gift Organizer keeps track of your loved ones and of special occasions like birthdays, and makes just-in-time gift recommendations via e-mail.

Never spend the morning of her birthday scrambling for a gift, any gift, ever again. Enter your loved ones' names, birth dates, gender, and Amazon wish list into [Amazon's Gift Organizer](#), plus gift-worthy occasions for each, like birthdays, anniversaries, or graduation. Then sit back and relax. When the big day nears, you'll receive an e-mail reminder that contains eerily on-target gift recommendations. Order on the spot and you'll have the perfect present in hand right on time.

6. Stay Organized by Phone With Jott

The screenshot displays the Jott web application interface. At the top, the Jott logo is followed by the text "Beta" and "Get simple back.". To the right, the user's name "Gina Trapani" is shown alongside links for "Settings", "How to Jott", "FAQ", "Support", "What's New!", and "Logout". A search bar labeled "Search Jotts and Contacts" with a "Go" button is also present.

The main content area is titled "My Links" and contains a table with the following structure:

Links	Description	Delete
Edit  Remember the Milk	Learn More	Delete
Edit  Sandy	Learn More	Delete
Edit  Google Calendar	Learn More	Delete

On the left sidebar, there are links for "<< Back to Inbox", "My Links" (with a heart icon), and "All Links" (with a gear icon). The right sidebar features a "Send a Jott" button, a "Developers - Got a custom link to add? Add it here" link, and a "Do you have a great idea for a link? Let us know!" link.

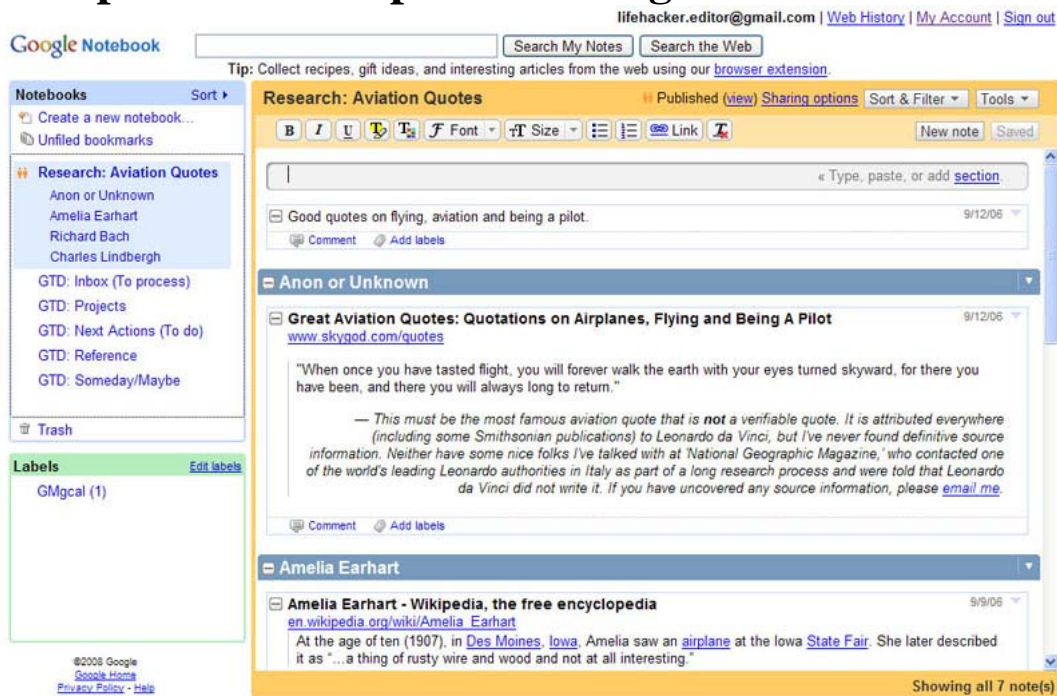
At the bottom of the page, the text "Talk to Jott : (866) JOTT-123 / (866) 568-8123" is displayed, followed by a row of links: "About", "Terms of Service", "Privacy", "Blog", "Press", "Contact Us", and "Developers". A footer note states: "Jott.com and Jott are trademarks of Jott Networks Inc. - Get more done with hands free mobile email, text/sms and to do lists."

Link your favorite online organizers to your Jott account, like Google Calendar, Remember the Milk, and Sandy, to add appointments, notes, and tasks to those services by voice.

If thumbing text on your mobile's keypad isn't your cup of tea, call [Jott](#) instead. At its most basic level, Jott is a transcription service--speak a note to yourself, and Jott transcribes your message and e-mails you the text. But Jott's functionality goes way beyond that when it acts as a conduit to other Web applications.

For example, using Jott, you can add appointments to your Google Calendar over the phone, e-mail Sandy, add an item to your Remember the Milk to-do list, or even search Amazon for a product you're interested in, all by voice. Once you've signed up and configured your account, simply call Jott's number (866-JOTT-123), say the name of service you want to access, and speak your message.

7. Capture Web Clips With Google Notebook



Organize Web research--like your favorite quotes about aviation--using Google Notebook.


You've got two dozen browser tabs open again, and this time, bookmarking them all just won't cut it. It's time to try [Google Notebook](#).

One of Google's lesser-known products, Notebook is an indispensable tool for Web researchers. Save sections of Web pages to your Google Notebook and annotate them with your own notes and comments. Organize your clippings into multiple notebooks that you can break down into sections, rearrange your notes by dragging and dropping them into the right page, and search your notebooks using Google's signature special search sauce that you already know and love. Notebook also turns clipping pages into a one-click operation with the Google Notebook browser extension, available for both Firefox and Internet Explorer.

8. Organize Your Itinerary With TripIt

Trip Details

☐ Summary View ☒ Expanded View


FLIGHT

9:05pm
EDT

Flight from New York (JFK) to Amsterdam (AMS)
move | edit | delete

Delta Airlines 80
[Online Checkin](#)
[Check Flight Status](#)

Depart: New York (JFK),
9:05pm EDT
Arrive: Amsterdam (AMS),
10:45am CEST (+1 day)


nonstop
7h 40min
aircraft Boeing 767
3631 miles
COACH
seat 23G
[get seating advice](#)

Conf. # CJ

Passengers
Gina Trapani

Booking Information
Booked on Delta Airlines 3/15/2008
<http://www.delta.com/>
1-800-221-1212


Tuesday, April 15, 2008
Amsterdam, Netherlands (Edit)
Avg: Sunny / Hi 55°F / Lo 39°F
[Add Plans](#)


MAPS

10:55am
CEST

Map of Amsterdam, Netherlands
delete

Amsterdam, Netherlands



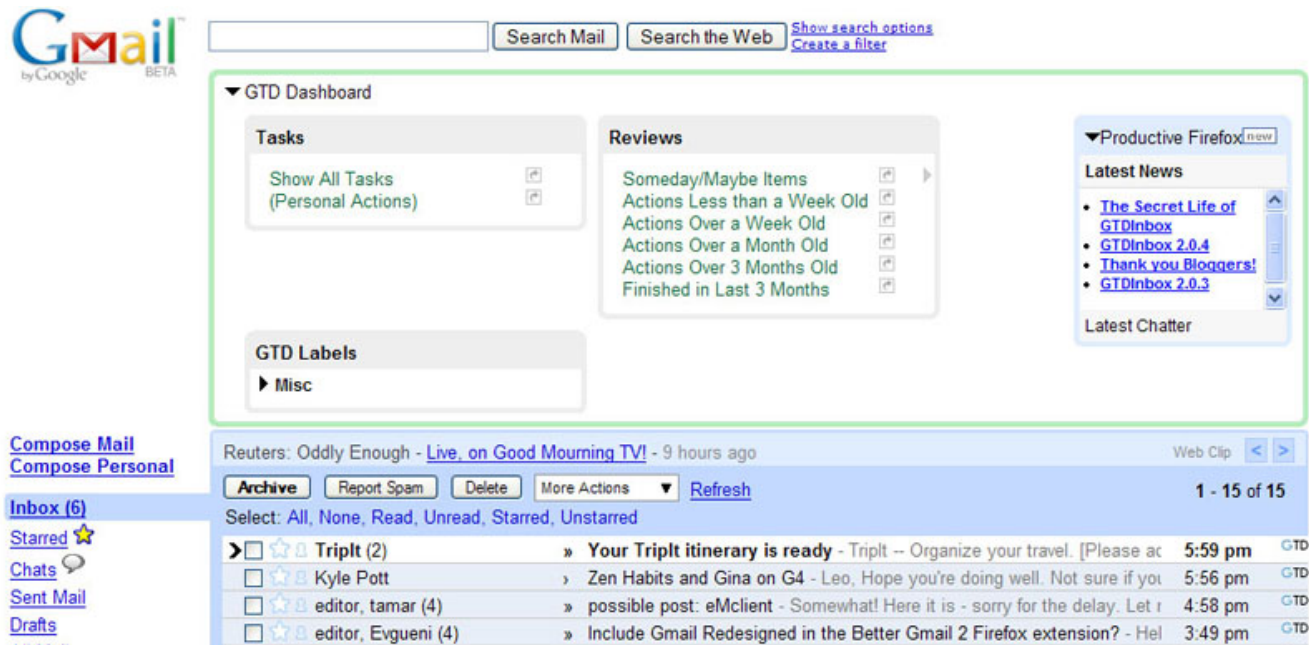
Map | Satellite | Hybrid

TripIt organizes your travel itinerary onto one page, and automatically includes maps and the weather forecast for your destination.

Instead of letting your flight, hotel, and car reservation e-mail confirmations languish in the depths of your inbox, forward them, before you travel, to plans@tripit.com.

The [Tripit](#) travel organizer will parse the messages and pull together a master trip itinerary onto one Web page that includes maps, a weather forecast, directions, and city guides for your destination--you know, all the stuff you'd look up by hand anyway. Plus, you can add notes to your TripIt itinerary, and share it with friends or colleagues to view, collaborate, and comment on.

9. Turn Gmail Into a Personal Information Database With GTDInbox



The GTDInbox Firefox extension adds a GTD Dashboard to the top of your Gmail account that helps you slice, dice, and review your tasks.

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Dedicated Gmail users who lament its lack of a to-do list will want the [GTDInbox](#) Firefox extension. GTDInbox implements the organization techniques that David Allen pioneered in his geek-hit productivity bible, *Getting Things Done*. With GTDInbox installed, star any message to turn it into a "next action"; list and add tasks right inside Gmail; and review tasks by how long they've been around (less than a week, longer than a week, longer than a month, longer than three months) to see how much of a slacker you've been (or not.)

Gina Trapani is the lead editor of Lifehacker.com and the author of Upgrade Your Life: The Lifehacker Guide to Working Smarter, Faster, Better.

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